TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

PINEYWOODS POST

A publication of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for landowners and outdoor enthusiasts of the Pineywoods.

Spring has sprung! In what should be one of the coldest months of the year, we are having near record highs and buds are starting to break. Luckily we have been receiving plenty of moisture in the Pineywoods and from what I can tell from recent browse surveys, we are going into Spring in pretty good shape.

In this edition of the Pineywoods Post we will take a look at some of the Pineywoods latest inhabitants, the white winged dove, one of our prettiest plants. a native hibiscus, and get a Eastern Turkey research update from District Leader Gary Calkins.

Inside This Edition

CRITTER CORNER

RECENT ARRIVALS TO THE PINEYWOODS

Sean Willis TPWD Wildlife Biologist (Lufkin)

Doves are one of the most common species of birds found in Texas, and are sought after by more Texas hunters (400,000) than any other species except deer (600,000). Doves are also one of the most recognizable species of birds, even to the casual observer.

There are 7 species of dove and pigeon indigenous to Texas. Only the 3 most common species (mourning, White -winged and White -tipped) are currently hunted. There are 2 species of pigeon (the Red -billed and Band- tailed) that are listed as game birds, but are not hunted, and then there are the small Inca dove and Common ground -dove that are also not hunted. Besides these, there are also the feral rock dove or common pigeon and the Eurasian Collared-dove that has arrived on the scene in the past few years. These last two are considered exotic or non-native and therefore are afforded no protection and may be taken at any time. The Eurasian Collared-dove has rapidly expanded its range over the past couple of decades and is now a common bird in many urban environments.

All doves and pigeons are in the family Columbidae and share characteristics such as soft, thick plumage of various color patterns (usually dull brown to gray) and display some degree of iridescence. There are no seasonal changes in coloration, and sexes are similar except females may be somewhat duller in appearance. Doves build a loose nest of twigs in the upper branches of trees and usually lay 2 eggs. Both sexes share in incubation of eggs, and the young are fed a substance called "pigeon milk" which is secreted from the adult's crop.

The most recent arrival to the Piney Woods is the White-winged dove. While the estimated population of White- winged doves in Texas is upwards of 5 million birds, they have historically been considered a south Texas resident, nesting in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Beginning in the 1980's, breeding populations of White-winged doves began to expand their range and are now starting to show up more frequently in areas other than south and central Texas.

The White- winged dove, *Zenaida asiatica*, is distinguished from the mourning dove, *Zenaida macroura*, in several ways: a noticeably larger size, a conspicuous white line along the edge of its closed wing and a red eye surrounded by blue skin. It also has a distinctive "who cooks for you?" call compared to the more common "ooahoo oo oo oo" call of the mourning dove.

For the past few years, TPWD Biologists have surveyed doves in urban areas in addition to the historical rural dove surveys in an effort to improve the picture of dove population estimates. Biologists have also been trapping and banding doves statewide as part of an ongoing national effort to monitor dove population and harvest trends. It was during one of my urban dove surveys in Lufkin in 2011 that I made contact with a resident that informed me that he had been seeing White-winged doves in his neighborhood. After surveying the neighborhood, I found that there were indeed a fair number of White-winged doves in the area, and arranged to trap and band doves in the area during the 2012 trapping season.

The dove trapping and banding operations are conducted during July and August, and biologists are asked to band a certain quota for their area. In the past 4 years, District 6 has banded approximately one thousand mourning doves. Bands returned by hunters allow us to gain valuable information on migration habits, harvest rates and longevity of the birds. During the 2012 banding season, I was able to trap and band 9 White-winged doves in addition to my 44 mourning dove quota. White-winged doves, while less numerous than the mourning doves, also proved to be more trap shy. Five of the nine White-winged doves that I trapped were juvenile birds which indicate that white wings have indeed been nesting in the Lufkin area, which had not previously been documented

It remains to be seen how the range expansion of both Eurasian Collared-dove and White -winged dove will impact mourning dove populations in the Piney Woods. We do know that both of these species, while competing for the same food sources, tend to frequent urban and suburban areas much more than rural areas. This also makes them much more visible to the public, particularly back yard birders who keep a close watch on their bird feeders. So, after your next successful dove hunt, be sure to check your bag for the presence of bands. You should also keep an eye out the next time you are watching birds around your bird feeder. You never know when you may spot a White-winged dove or a banded mourning dove. If you do find a band, please be sure to report it by calling 1-800-327-BAND. If you believe that you have resident White-winged doves in you r area, give you local biologist a call so that we can track their expansion into the Piney Woods.

The author Sean Willis banding a white winged dove in Lufkin as part of a larger dove monitoring program

BIOLOGIST BIO

SEAN WILLIS, TPWD WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST, LUFKIN, TX

PW Post: What is your job title and what are your main job duties?
SW: We used to use the term "regulatory" biologist, but we are now called "district" biologist. Basically I am assigned a group of counties and primarily work in those counties (Angelina, Nacogdoches, and Trinity). I assist landowners and hunting clubs in regards to technical assistance, and implementation of our Managed Lands Deer Permit (MLDP) program, as well as carry out district business which includes wildlife surveys, data collection, regulation proposals, outreach and whatever comes up on a daily basis.

PW Post: How many years did you spend in college and what are your degrees in?
SW: I have a bachelor of science in forestry (BSF) from Stephen F. Austin State University (1992) with a double major in Wildlife Management and Timber Management and took about 5 years.

PW Post: Can you tell our readers a little bit about your background and how you became interested in being a wildlife biologist?
SW: I grew up in the Pineywoods of east Texas, and was always an avid hunter and fisherman. After high school I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do so I got all my basics and an associate of arts degree from Angelina College and then moved on to SFA and the College of Forestry. I decided I wanted a job where I could work outside. I wanted to get a wildlife emphasis, but was mistakenly told I really needed a masters degree to get a wildlife job, so I decided to go timber. Upon graduation I got a job as a forester for a private consultant primarily cruising and marking timber. After almost a year of that I decided I wanted to do something else. I saw a job posted on the SFA bulletin board for a TPWD research project and met with the Regional Director who hired me to start a 2 year black bear habitat suitability study for east Texas. After the research was completed, I moved on to the turkey program as the state was in the middle of a block stocking program. It was during this time that I began going back to SFA to take wildlife management classes. After a year in the turkey program, I was hired as the first wildlife technician for Alazan Bayou Wildlife Management Area, and continued to get the required course work to get my Wildlife Biologist certification from The Wildlife Society (TWS). This allowed me to get the Lufkin biologist position when it came open in 2000 where I have been ever since.

PW Post: What is your philosophy as a wildlife biologist?
SW: I often think about how things were in my Grandpa's day and how things have changed. I then think of how much things have changed since I was kid, and wonder how much things will change by the time I have grand kids. I hope they have the same opportunities (or more) than I had to enjoy the outdoors. If I have a philosophy it is to do what I can to ensure that that happens. I also think of Aldo Leopold the father of wildlife management, and his philosophies what he would think about where we have gone since his time.

PW Post: What do you enjoy the most about your job?
SW: I enjoy being in the outdoors and working with those people who are interested in the outdoors and stewardship of our natural resources.

PW Post: What do you find the most challenging?
SW: I think changing the misconceptions of the general public in regards to wildlife and management issues may be the most challenging. Few other professions deal with a clientele that have as many preconceived notions about the subject they are asked to address.

PW Post: What is the most amazing (or scary) experience you've had while working with wildlife?
SW: I have gotten to do several cool things in my career. Trapping and working on black bears on the Tensas Refuge in Louisiana was really memorable as was assisting with research on pronghorns in West Texas last year. Helping wrangle deer and alligators have also left a mark or two.

PW Post: Do you have any advice for students who want to be professional wildlife biologists?
SW: Get as much experience as you can while at school in terms of volunteer work, wildlife projects or internships. Also work on selling yourself. This will make you more attractive to a prospective employer.

PW Post: What are your personal interests?
SW: After faith and family, my primary passion is hunting and behind that fishing. I really enjoy hunting with my 2 kids, predator hunting, deer hunting and any other hunting opportunities I get.

TPWD Biologist Sean Willis working during the Trans Pecos pronghorn decline research project.

PLANT PROFILE
NATIVE HIBISCUS

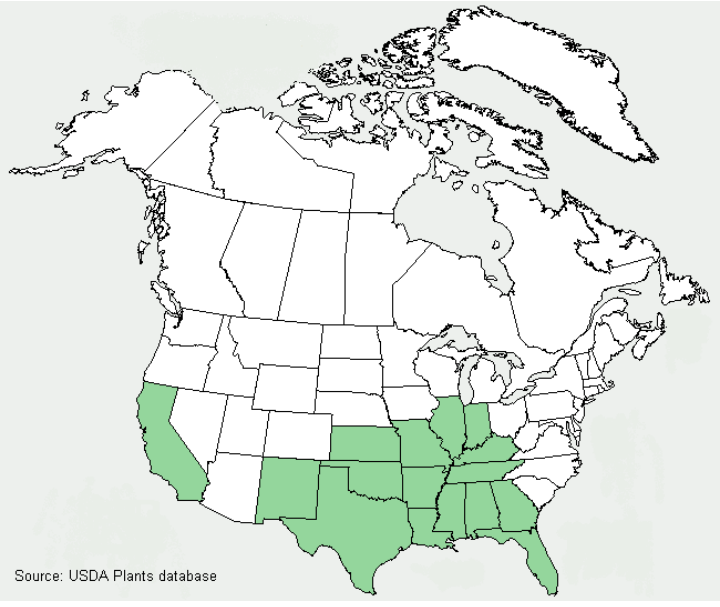
DAN JONES TPWD WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST (HUNTSVILLE)

Wooly rosemallow, *Hibiscus lasiocarpus Cav.*

The Pineywoods are blessed with an abundance of wetland habitats, and there we find numerous plant species that are restricted to this watery world. One of the most distinctive is a native hibiscus, the wooly rosemallow. This member of the mallow family (Malvaceae) is widely distributed and common in wetlands across the southern U.S. from New Mexico to Florida and northward in the Mississippi River basin to Illinois. A disjunct population also occurs in the Sacramento River basin in north-central California. Throughout its range, there are three recognized subtaxa in addition to the nominate race. One subspecies is listed as endangered in Indiana. In Texas, it generally occurs only along the middle to upper coast and in major river basins in the east along stream banks, sloughs, swamps, marshes, lakes, and wet meadows. Common associates in these habitats are cattail, bulrushes, buttonbush, pickerelweed, sedges, long-leaf pondweed, lizard's tail, and other native hibiscus species the halberdleaf and Neches River rosemallows. Its growth habit is that of a large forb or subshrub, with multiple stems to 6.5 feet arising from a single crown atop a large, woody rootstock. This hibiscus is a cold-hardy perennial that dies back during winter, and begins rapid regrowth beginning in late February or March.

Leaves are large and heart-shaped with the upper surfaces being grayish-green and the lower surfaces very light green, with coarsely toothed leaf margins. Leaves, bracts, stems, and fruit capsules are pubescent; or covered with numerous short white hairs (trichomes). Lasiocarpus translates from Greek as "hairy fruited". The inflorescence is typical of the mallows, being borne on the apex of stems with a tubular column of yellow stamens extending from the center of the corolla. The five petals are creamy white (rarely pink or maroon), with a band of crimson or burgundy at the base. The showy flowers are up to six inches in diameter and bloom for one day each during May through October, during which large plants may produce 20 to 30 open flowers per day at the peak of bloom. The seeds mature within a capsule about 1.5 inches long and persist on the plant until fall. When they drop from the capsule, fertile seeds are buoyant, which aids in their dispersal and availability as a wildlife food source.

Due to its structure and growth in or near water, many fish and wildlife species use this plant for cover. The seeds are consumed by waterfowl and upland birds such as Wood ducks and Northern bobwhite, and the nectar feeds hummingbirds and bumblebees, which are this species' primary pollinators. The foliage is consumed by beetles and by aquatic invertebrates as detritus when it falls into the water and decomposes. The wooly rosemallow is a good shoreline plant for conservation uses as it stabilizes the soil, minimizes erosion, and will spread under favorable conditions but is not invasive. Plants can be propagated by seeding, transplanting whole plants or a portion of the rootstock during dormancy, or stem cuttings. Moist soil with a neutral to acidic pH and an open, sunny location are the few requirements of this beneficial and attractive native hibiscus. Be on the lookout for it this summer!



CONSERVATION NEWS

LAURA SPEIGHT TPWD WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST/ NE TX CDN CHAIR

We are all aware that we live in a world where the challenges to preserve and protect our natural resources seem more daunting than ever before. The catastrophic wildfires and drought of 2011 are fresh in our memories and we are still seeing the impact of drought stress on the trees that have died or are dying. Compounding an already dire situation are our hard economic times. Budget cuts and lack of funding are major hurdles that all agencies tasked with conservation of our natural resources are facing.

In the early spring of 2012 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) personnel from the northern half of the Pineywoods met with representatives of the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) to discuss ways to continue to deliver on-the-ground conservation in the face of all the current challenges. Habitat loss and degradation, urban sprawl and habitat fragmentation, altered hydrology and lack of prescribed fire are some of the "deliverables" we must address in our area. So just what is the LMVJV and why did TPWD meet with them?

In 1986 the North American Waterfowl Management Plan called for the establishment of Migratory Bird Joint Ventures to conserve habitat for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people. These Joint Ventures are a national model for partnership-driven conservation. There are currently 22 habitat-based joint ventures in North America with the LMVJV addressing conservation issues in our geographic area.

Like the LMVJV, TPWD also has a history of working with other state/ federal/ local governmental agencies, universities, non-governmental agencies, and private landowners. Recently the LMVJV developed two Conservation Delivery Networks (CDN's) to help facilitate conservation partnerships in Arkansas and Louisiana/Mississippi. The concept of the CDN was exactly what TPWD wanted to pursue for our area so now we are in the beginning stages of forming the North East Texas Conservation Delivery Network. This CDN will be the first one established in Texas.

Our belief is the CDN will facilitate more effective communication, coordination and collaboration among a full spectrum of conservation organizations. This way we should be able to increase our resources and thus more effectively achieve our common vision to deliver on-the- ground conservation. These actions include, but are not limited to:

- Biological planning, conservation design, and prioritization;
- Project development and implementation;
- Communications, education and outreach; and
- Funding support for projects and activities.

TPWD has taken the leadership role of the NE TX CDN and the process has begun with the formation of a planning committee comprised of several major conservation organizations which are equally anxious to pursue this partnership. By maximizing our knowledge and experience through collaboration and coordination we will be better able to positively impact the landscape for wildlife populations.

This new era of open communication and collaboration between conservation agencies will benefit private landowners seeking assistance in many positive ways. With all CDN agencies working together towards the identified needs of the area and the pooling of their agency resources landowners will find a much clearer path to follow to reach their conservation goals. Thinking about a wildlife project on your place? Need some advice? Contact your local TPWD biologist who with the implementation of the NE

"The practice of conservation must spring from a conviction of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, water, fauna, and flora, as well as people." *Aldo Leopold*

Outdoor Snapshots

Rusty Wood TPWD Wildlife Biologist (Nacogdoches)

December 28th started like any other day on the Sabine River in Panola County until a local fisherman spotted an unusual sight on the river bank. It was a Bald Eagle, and something was wrong with it. It was soaked to the bone and couldn't fly. A Texas Parks and Wildlife Game Warden was called and plans were put into motion to rescue the bird. After securing the bird, it was transported to Wild and Free Again, a bird rehabilitation center located in Lindale, TX. It is one of only four raptor rehab centers in the state that are licensed to work with eagles.

Once there, the bird was examined by Mrs. Beverly Grage, a licensed raptor rehabilitator, and her vet who is also the vet for Caldwell Zoo in Tyler. The eagle was a large, strong female, and it didn't have any apparent injuries. Mrs. Grage said that it is not uncommon for raptors that fish like the Bald Eagle to hit the water with such force that it can fracture the bone structure that ties their wings to their powerful breast muscles. These fractures are hard to identify and do not always show up on x-rays.

The eagle was kept in an isolation cage for several weeks giving the injury time to rest and heal. The eagle initially refused all meals of rats which all of the other raptors in her care happily dined on. It occurred to Mrs. Grage that this was a river bird and had probably fished its whole life for its meals. She left an offering of Sand bass for the eagle and when she returned, the whole fish was gone. The pattern was set and they soon had a plan for recovery.

After several weeks the eagle was strong enough to be moved to a flight pen to exercise her wings and build up stamina. After nearly a month in the flight pen with daily exercises, the eagle was well enough to be released again. She was transported back to the exact spot on the river where she was found. She was released on Valentine's Day with the hope that she would rejoin her mate on the banks of the Sabine River. Upon release she sailed across the river to the top of a large tree where she sat for a few minutes to survey her surroundings. From there she made a few circles around the small crowd that had gathered finally catching a thermal updraft that carried her high above the river and surrounding trees. For her the journey was over, she was wild and free again.

Photos by Andrea Webb/ TPWD Wildlife Biologist

Mrs. Grage tells me that she began working with mammals back in the early 90's and raptors in the mid 90's. She finally received her federal permit to work with eagles in 2010. Mrs. Grage only works with raptors these days and takes in roughly 100 per year, a number that is steadily increasing. Her small non profit works solely on private funds (mostly her own) and whatever donations she can secure. You can learn more about her work at www.wildandfreeagain.org.

Send us your photos! Send us your wildlife, nature, hunter harvest, or interesting trail cam pictures.
To submit your photo for consideration send an email to Rusty.Wood@TPWD.State.TX.US and tell us who took it, where, and when.

EASTERN TURKEY RESEARCH UPDATE

BY GARY CALKINS PINEYWOODS DISTRICT LEADER

The year 2000 marked a milestone in one of the largest wildlife restoration projects ever undertaken in Texas. Known to many as the Target 2000 project, that year marked the culmination of the major releases of eastern wild turkey into the east Texas Pineywoods. A few more turkey releases did occur over the following years but the bulk of the work was done, or so everyone thought. Spring hunting seasons opened in most Pineywoods counties where turkeys had been non-existent only a few years before. Even as that project was winding down, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) personnel discussed strategies to build upon the existing knowledge of turkey dynamics in East Texas. These discussions launched a series of research projects designed to improve our ability to manage turkeys.

The most pressing question being tossed around was the most basic; how many birds did we think may be out there? Other states in the Southeast opened a turkey season in a county when the ratio of hens to poults reached a specified level. TPWD followed that approach by gathering observation data collected by landowners and sportsmen in each of the release areas. When the hen to poult ratio reached the predetermined goal, TPWD would propose to open a very conservative turkey season in that particular county. While that technique provides some useful information, it cannot be used to provide reliable population estimates. Another technique involved an observer driving along a transect and stopping every half mile and listening for a gobbler. This technique indicated that there were some birds present if the observer heard a gobble but didn't lead to the answer of how many birds were on the landscape. Throughout the range of the eastern turkey, a survey method to provide reliable population estimates has yet to be developed. Ultimately, this led to the first phase of research on turkeys in the Pineywoods.

A project was initiated between TPWD and Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) to evaluate the current gobble count technique and try to improve upon it. For two years, turkeys were captured, fitted with radio transmitters to track movements and followed year round. The location intensity on the birds increased during the period of late March and early April when the gobble counts were conducted. The goal was to see how many birds were present and not gobbling during the actual gobble count survey. That number would hopefully provide some insight into the validity of the gobble counts. The other product of the study was to review the habitat used by the birds during the March-April period in an effort to predict the best places to conduct gobble count routes. Even with this project in full swing, other questions were popping up.

As everyone was flipping the calendar over to start 2007, TPWD was in the process of entering a new phase of the eastern turkey research. During 2007-08, four sites were stocked with birds captured in Tennessee and South Carolina to initiate a study known as the Super Stocking project. The answers acquired from this intense research would provide valuable knowledge to guide the future management decisions concerning the turkey program in the Pineywoods. Some of these questions involve future releases, numbers of birds in the releases, habitat needs, and success of our previous releases.

As this project was in the planning stages, four release sites were selected in east Texas. Each site was required to: 1) encompass at least 10,000 acres, 2) contain suitable eastern turkey habitat, 3) have the potential for a successful release, and 4) contain cooperative landowners willing to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with TPWD. Agreements were forged with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the states of Tennessee and South Carolina to become key players with this project. The NWTF would serve as the intermediary between TPWD and the other state agencies in getting trapped birds into Texas, and the states of South Carolina and Tennessee would trap and supply the birds. The final key player in this project was the Wildlife Faculty and students from SFASU. Under the direction of Professors Comer and Conway, wildlife students would locate birds fitted with radio transmitters several times a week in order to document most every move of the released birds.

Eastern Turkey Research Update Cont.

All of these activities came together in a well choreographed series of releases during that two year span. Countless hours of phone conversations, many nights in airports waiting for birds to come off planes and thousands of miles of travel to pick up birds in other states resulted in the release of many healthy birds into Texas. As the releases wound down and some sighs of relief were shed, the real work got rolling; answering the questions that started the whole project. With the work of the SFASU folks, large amounts of information were gathered, compiled and analyzed. This research answered questions like: Do the increased number of birds per release increase the chance of a successful restoration effort? What habitat types are the hens looking for during their nesting and brood rearing efforts? What habitat types lead to successful releases? Is there a good chance to build a better population of birds in the Pineywoods? Probably the most prominent outcome of this research was the formulation of a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) for East Texas. Previous studies had provided a loose framework of turkey habitat requirements but lacked the volume and detail of data collected during this study. The new HSI is pretty specific and will be used to evaluate sites for future turkey releases. The research shows that most areas in East Texas are lacking in one habitat type or another and may have a difficult time meeting the minimum requirements of the HSI. But the use of the HSI will insure that only the areas that provide the best opportunity for turkey survival and reproduction will be considered for future stockings. The first step is having 10,000 acres of suitable habitat then the evaluation continues from there.

As these projects were ongoing, two other studies were up and running as well. One would examine the genetic makeup of the birds we did have in the Pineywoods and the other would study the predator relationships with our turkey population.

With the large number of birds that came into the state with the Target 2000 project, there was an underlying question whether transplanted birds from one state or part of the country survived and reproduced better than others. To answer this, feathers from hunter harvested birds were collected from the turkey check stations for the genetic study. The ancestry of the birds was then determined from DNA analysis of the feathers. The results showed there is a mixture of birds in the Pineywoods with birds from all states represented in the mix. The source of the original brood stock had little effect since turkeys originating from the Midwest were just as successful as birds from the Southeast. Lastly, the predator study also resulted in some interesting results. It appears from this three year project that predators do not play as large a role in the population dynamics of the turkeys in Texas as one may think. Several different species of predators were fitted with transmitters, followed, their scat analyzed, and the results are pretty clear that there is minimal impact from the predatory animals studied on the turkey population in the Pineywoods.

It has been a busy time period in the world of eastern turkeys in Texas, and it isn't over yet. Currently, there is a project in the planning stages to put satellite transmitters on some more birds in the Pineywoods to continue to collect habitat information. Specifically, the goal is to refine our knowledge of turkey nesting and brood rearing habitat requirements. The results of past and future research projects have enhanced our understanding of Pineywoods turkeys and improved our position to move forward with a successful turkey program in East Texas.

Turkey release during the Super Stocking research project